

St Christopher's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106256
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	309073
Inspection date	13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Wall

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Sheahan
Headteacher	Susan Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
School address	St Christopher's Road Ashton-under-Lyne Lancashire OL6 9DP
Telephone number	0161 3305880
Fax number	0161 3437296

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data; the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the school at work; interviews with senior members of staff and pupils; the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in the self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is an average size primary school serving an urban area of increasing social and economic disadvantage. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils entering the school with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language has been growing in recent years, reflecting the changing nature of the school's catchment area. Overall, however, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average. It has recently gained the Healthy Schools award and Activemark status.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. In response to teaching which is never less than good and sometimes truly inspirational, pupils make exceptional progress as they move up through the school. Outstanding leadership and management, particularly on the part of the very dynamic headteacher, are driving the school forward at a fast pace. Excellent progress has been made in tackling successfully all the issues identified at the last inspection. Facilities for the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 classes have been dramatically improved. Teaching and assessment are now focused much more sharply on pupils' learning. As a result, standards are high and improving, as is the progress pupils make. Most parents are supportive of the school and value it highly. A few, however, are sceptical of the changes introduced, although they accept that these are designed to make the school even more effective. Some parents also express concern about staffing difficulties in one class but this has been stabilised. There is now a very strong and committed teaching and support staff. The school is finding it a challenge to meet the needs of the growing number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It has started to improve its provision by appointing extra support. Much remains to be done, however, to meet these pupils' needs as they move up the school and the number of pupils in this category continues to grow.

From starting points which are below average pupils make outstanding progress to attain standards which are consistently above average by the time they leave. The number of pupils attaining the higher levels in national tests in English, mathematics and science in Year 6 is high. The school sets increasingly demanding targets year on year and consistently achieves or exceeds them. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are above average. They have dipped in recent years because of the changing nature of the school's intake. Achievement is still outstanding, however, because teaching is adapting to meet pupils' different needs while still remaining dynamic and challenging.

Children are exceptionally happy at school. Attendance is above average and they behave respectfully and sensibly. Their social, spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding because of the school's committed Christian thinking which underpins its work and values. The school council is extremely active. For example, it has been successful in raising funds for, planning and building a very attractive school garden. The care, guidance and support provided by the school are of high quality. Pupils feel safe and valued. The school has worked very hard and successfully to improve its assessment and tracking procedures to support pupils' academic development. Pupils now have a firm understanding of what they are expected to achieve and what they need to do to meet their targets.

Pupils praise the teaching they receive. 'Teachers really try to make lessons fun. They expect us to work hard but are always ready to help us if we get stuck,' is a typical comment. Outstanding teaching is supported by a good and improving curriculum. This offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities that make a significant contribution to pupils' enjoyment and healthy lifestyles. Pupils value the changes that have taken place in the curriculum to break down the barriers between subjects but they wish they could have even more integrated days such as the 'eco days'.

At the heart of the school's success lie the headteacher's hard work, commitment and unrelenting focus on improvement. Her leadership is outstanding. She is ably supported by other senior leaders and managers. Staff morale is high and teamwork is strong. The role of governors has

grown so that they now offer outstanding levels of support and challenge for the school's development. Procedures for evaluating the school's effectiveness are thorough. They include the opinions of parents and pupils. The results of the wide-ranging consultations give the school an exceptionally accurate picture of its strengths and areas which could be even further improved. This unrelenting self-analysis and concentration on being even more effective is giving the school outstanding capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage unit. From starting points which are below those expected for their age when they enter the Nursery, children make outstanding progress to attain skills which are above age-related expectations by the end of Reception. Such strong progress is brought about by highly skilled teaching which provides the children with an exceptional range of activities to stimulate their interest and help them to develop their skills as inquisitive and independent learners. The Foundation Stage is led and managed outstandingly well. This ensures that the excellent facilities and resources are used to maximum effect to support children's learning and to provide a safe and stimulating environment for learning and play.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop provision to meet the needs of the growing number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for making me so welcome when I spent a day in your school recently. I enjoyed meeting you and talking with you. What you told me helped me greatly in coming to my judgements about how good your school is.

You will be pleased to know that your school is giving you an outstanding education. Your teachers work very hard to make lessons interesting and enjoyable. Because of this you make excellent progress in your learning as you move up through the school. The standards Year 6 pupils attain in national tests are a credit to the school and, of course, to their hard work! I was pleased to see how polite you all are and how well you get along together. You told me you enjoy school and I could see that was true by how happy you all look and how proud you are of your school. Your headteacher has worked extremely hard to make sure you get the best possible start in life the school can give you. She and all the adults working with you want to make the school even more successful and I am confident that you will help them to make sure this happens.

A growing number of pupils are joining the school needing extra support to help them in their learning so I am asking your school to make sure it develops the help it provides for these children in the coming years. I am sure you will also help these pupils in class so that they too, make outstanding progress.